



Indiana Department of Education

SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

April 14, 2009

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Dear Nate and John:

Thank you for your inquiries regarding the open-ended items of the spring ISTEP+ exam and for your efforts to compile and classify specific comments relating to the exam. As you are aware, following receipt of a high volume of concerns regarding this exam, I directed my staff to complete a comprehensive review of the test itself and the process leading up to it.

As you know, the multi-faceted review currently under way includes the following elements:

- An additional teacher item alignment process, through which approximately 160 teachers representing students by grade level and content area will review *all* open-ended questions and all *new* multiple choice questions in our item pool;
- An independent expert review of all math items, around which a majority of the questions were raised;
- Analyses by our vendor of both the reading load and timing of the exam; and
- An internal review of communication practices to determine whether all relevant audiences received our message.

I look forward to sharing the results of this review with superintendents, teachers, parents, and each of you in the coming months. In the meantime, attached please find responses to the questions posed by your organizations.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tony Bennett
Superintendent of Public Instruction

DOE Responses to 2009 ISTEP+ Inquiries

- 1. Were all of the constructed response math items aligned with appropriate grade-level standards?**

Every item was written to a specific grade level indicator/standard and reviewed by DOE staff, a teacher content review committee and a bias and sensitivity committee. Nearly one-third of the math items had been previously piloted, with only minor changes, in past fall ISTEP+ tests.

- 2. Were teachers clearly informed of the math academic standards to be assessed?**

Communication about the standards to be assessed began in earnest with spring 2008 ISTEP+ workshops held in twelve locations across the state, which were attended by approximately 1,600 Indiana educators. The presentations from these meetings were prepared in content-area grade spans and were posted on the DOE website. In December, 2008 the new ISTEP+ Item Samplers were posted online along with additional information about the test content.

Despite these efforts, the DOE failed to ensure that this important message reached our most important audience: the classroom teacher. In the future, DOE staff will seek more opportunities to communicate with teachers directly.

- 3. Were the test instructions and directions clear, precise and grade appropriate?**

Consistent with past practice, the teacher content review of test items included all of the text, the item stems and the graphics for each item.

- 4. Will the constructed response math items be used for NCLB adequate yearly progress determinations and/or PL 221 (1999) school category placement determinations?**

On March 25, 2009, the USDOE approved a request submitted by the DOE in January to use the Fall 2008 ISTEP+ tests as the final determiner of school improvement status for the 2009-10 school year. The spring 2009 ISTEP+ test results will be used as a base for the safe harbor decisions made as a part of the next round of AYP determinations that will occur in June 2010.

- 5. Will the constructed response math item student results be linked to teacher identification numbers?**

Currently, there is no mechanism to link a student's ISTEP+ data to his or her classroom teacher(s), because such results are only identified by the exam proctor.

6. Will an independent item analysis technical review be conducted?

Yes, a nationally-recognized mathematics organization will carry out an independent item review as part of a multi-pronged approach that will include an additional teacher item alignment process (with planned participation from approximately 160 teachers) and vendor evaluation of both the reading load and timing of the spring test.

7. When will math constructed response items become public?

The operational constructed response items for all content areas will be released once the State Board of Education has adopted the cut scores, which we expect will occur in late August, 2009.

8. (a) What was the role of the teacher review panels? (b) Did the teacher review panels write the questions? (c) Were the teacher review panel procedures different for the spring test than for previous tests?

(a) As they have in the past, the teacher review panels were asked to review each item for its alignment with the grade level Indiana Academic Standards and to determine if the language used was appropriate for the content.

(b) Indiana items are written by professional item writers and are reviewed and approved by three different independent panels: 1) the statutorily-required Citizen's Review Committee, 2) the teacher content review committee, and 3) the sensitivity and bias review committee.

(c) Other than the time of year that the panel was convened, the same processes were followed for the spring tests as have been followed in the past.